

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Advancing Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy

A Road Map and Call to Action

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Engagement in Democracy:

A Road Map and Call to Action

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The need to revitalize and reimagine civic education is urgent. But that urgent need brings a great opportunity—the chance to improve civic education in ways that will resonate for years.

—Secretary Arne Duncan

Remarks at the iCivics Educating for Democracy in a Digital Age conference, March 29, 2011, Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Since its founding, America’s leaders have recognized that one of the most important purposes of educating the nation’s citizens is to protect and strengthen democracy. Education in America must prepare all students for informed participation in civic and democratic life—so that all Americans are ready to tackle the challenges confronting communities and the nation in the 21st century and so that the United States can continue to serve as a model democracy for people and governments around the world. Yet, unfortunately, civic learning and democratic engagement¹ are add-ons rather than essential parts of the core academic mission in too many schools and on too many college campuses today. Many elementary and secondary schools are pushing civics and service-learning² to the sidelines, mistakenly treating education for citizenship as a distraction from preparing students for college-level mathematics, English, and other core subjects. Many, if not most, institutions of higher education now offer civic learning as an elective but not as an integral component of preparing students to compete in a knowledge based, global economy.

Every student in every school, college, and university deserves a high-quality education, including a high-quality civic education. Preparing all students— regardless of background or identity—for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life is not only essential, but also consistent with the aims of increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps. It is consistent with preparing students for 21st-century careers. And it is consistent with attaining President Obama’s goal to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. As Tony Wagner, codirector of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has said, “[There is a] happy convergence between the skills most needed in the global knowledge economy and those most needed to keep our democracy safe and vibrant.” The return on the hundreds of billions of dollars invested in education each year must be measured not just in terms of individual success in educational attainment and in the job market or even national economic growth. It also must be gauged by how well the next generation of Americans is prepared to solve collective problems creatively and collaboratively.

The year 2012 marks the 150th anniversary of the first Morrill Act—the landmark law that led to the creation of the first public land-grant universities. In 1890, the second Morrill Act established Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Together, these Morrill Act institutions opened the gates of higher education to millions more citizens and emphasized education to solve real-world problems. For that, land-grant colleges and universities have been called “democracy’s colleges” (Boggs 2010).

¹ By “civic learning and democratic engagement” we mean educational experiences that intentionally prepare students for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life by providing opportunities to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through learning and practice. These include civics and government as subjects unto themselves but also service-learning and other approaches for integrating a civic and democratic dimension into other disciplines, such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). See “A New Generation of Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement” below for further examples.

² Service-learning is an instructional approach that integrates classroom instruction with community projects.

Today, the Department joins the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, the American Commonwealth Partnership, and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools in a new national call to action to infuse and enhance civic learning and democratic engagement for all students throughout the American education system.

The Department is broadly supportive of the five priorities for action that these groups have developed. In abbreviated form, those priorities are:

1. Advancing civic learning and democratic engagement in both the U.S. and global contexts by encouraging efforts to make them core expectations for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary students—including undergraduate and graduate students;
2. Developing more robust evidence of civic and other student achievement outcomes of civic learning, and of the impact of school- and campus community partnerships;
3. Strengthening school- and campus-community connections to address significant community problems and advance a local or regional vision and narrative for civic engagement;
4. Expanding research and the range of public scholarship, with a special emphasis on promoting knowledge creation for the good of society;
5. Deepening civic identity by sharing stories of civic work in social media and organizing deliberative discussions about the roles of higher education in communities across the country, and by creating initiatives in science, arts, and other fields to catalyze civic agency.³

In the pages that follow, the Department outlines directions for advancing civic learning and democratic engagement from grade school to graduate school, with special attention to the federal role and civic learning in higher education. It concludes by proposing nine steps that the Department can take to help expand and elevate civic learning.

This Departmental Road Map affirms the sense of shared urgency about bolstering civic learning reflected in the newly released report, commissioned by the Department, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*. In much the same vein, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools in 2011 released its important report *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*, recommending ways to reinvigorate civic education in our nation's elementary and secondary schools.

Few would question that postsecondary institutions and public schools must today prepare students for a global, competitive job market, or that a good STEM education and superior reading and writing skills are important components of a world-class education. But it is a

³ Civic agency is the capacity to act cooperatively and collectively on common problems and challenges.

mistake to assume that advancing civic learning and democratic engagement is a zero-sum proposition that comes at the expense of STEM preparation and higher-order communication skills. A growing body of evidence, including some outlined in *A Crucible Moment*, indicates that high-quality civic learning and democratic engagement is a win-win proposition in higher education and career preparation (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2011). The *Guardian of Democracy* report similarly cites studies suggesting that civic learning not only promotes civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but also builds the “twenty-first century competencies” that employers value and is associated with better school climate and lower dropout rates (Gould 2011).

More rigorous research is required, but findings to date are encouraging. To cite one example, service-learning in institutions of higher education is correlated with increased retention and completion rates. Research from UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) reported that students who participated in community service during their first year of college had significantly higher GPAs in their senior year and reported higher post-college educational aspirations (Aston 2000). A 2010 Campus Compact report highlights research showing that higher intensity service-learning experiences are associated with higher rates of retention and academic engagement (Cress 2010). And *A Crucible Moment* underscores that the 21st-century skills prized by employers are the very same skills students develop when they participate in high-impact civic learning. Done well, civic education teaches students to communicate effectively, to work collaboratively, to ask tough questions, and to appreciate diversity.

Fortunately, both faculty and students themselves want education to teach students how to make a difference, and both seek a stronger connection between their community engagement and the classroom and curriculum. Faculty support for instilling a commitment to community engagement in college and enhancing students’ knowledge and appreciation of other racial or ethnic groups has increased since 2005 (DeAngelo 2009). According to HERI surveys, roughly four in five faculty members interviewed believe that teaching tolerance and respect for different beliefs was very important or essential—and three in four said the same for engaging students in civil discourse on controversial issues (*ibid*). This faculty interest has translated into expanded civic opportunities for students. Service-learning courses that combine curricular learning with community projects have grown substantially in recent decades at both two-year and four-year institutions. The American Association of Community Colleges reports that 60 percent of community colleges offer service-learning in their curricular programs, and that 30 percent would like to start service-learning initiatives (Prentice 2003).

Chapter 1: A Moment of Opportunity: Reinvigorating and Reimagining Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

Now is a propitious time to advance civic learning and democratic engagement in American education. The moment is ripe for reform because the state of civic knowledge and engagement among Americans is poor, even as the interest in civic learning and engagement among students, teachers, and faculty remains high. The 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics found that only 27 percent, 22 percent, and 24 percent of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfthgrade students, respectively, performed at proficiency, and a significant civic achievement gap persists between racial and ethnic groups. Even more troubling, NAEP documented recent declines in the overall civic knowledge of high school seniors between 2006 and 2010 (NCES 2011). And while America’s democratic ideals remain a model for the world, democratic participation in the United States is far from exceptional. For example, on a 2007 international ranking of 172 democracies, the United States ranked 139th in voter participation (McCormick Tribune Foundation 2007). As these data suggest, our public schools and postsecondary institutions are simply doing too little today to adequately prepare Americans for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life. We must measure the success of civic learning and democratic engagement opportunities not only by whether they are provided to all students but also by whether they are effective. To be sure, exemplary programs abound—but they stand out precisely because most schools and postsecondary institutions struggle to balance or integrate civic learning with other pressing academic concerns.

A New Generation of Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy

While high-quality civic learning is still not the norm on most college campuses or in most public schools, a new generation of organizations promoting civic learning and engagement is taking hold in many schools and on many campuses. The next generation of civic learning initiatives—described in more detail in the *Guardian of Democracy* and *A Crucible Moment* reports—forms a promising foundation for elevating and expanding civic learning.

In contrast to traditional civic education, civic learning and democratic engagement today are more ambitious and participatory than in the past. Secretary Arne Duncan and retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor have pointed out that if civic education is to become more engaging, it must seek to move beyond your “grandmother’s civics” to what has been labeled “action civics” (O’Connor and Duncan 2011). The goals of traditional civic education, such as increasing civic knowledge, voter participation, or volunteerism, remain worth pursuing. However, the new generation of civic learning puts students at the center and includes both learning and practice—not just rote memorization of names, dates, and processes. And more and more, civic educators are harnessing the power of technology and social networking to engage students across place and time. The next generation of civic learning features a mix of public, private, and nonprofit initiatives. Perhaps the leading example from the public sector is AmeriCorps, a program within the Corporation for National and Community Service. It has had an especially notable presence on college campuses and has formed a number of high-profile public-private partnerships. AmeriCorps is in fact a network of three national service programs—AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps*VISTA, and AmeriCorps*National Civilian Corps (NCCC)—all of which rely in significant measure on college students to tutor

disadvantaged students, provide disaster services, assist veterans and military families, participate in environmental preservation efforts, expand health services, and foster economic opportunity.

One promising sign of the burgeoning interest in community service and service-learning is that the number of individuals applying to AmeriCorps has jumped from about 360,000 in the 2008–09 program year to more than 536,000 in 2010. In 2011, AmeriCorps had roughly 80,000 members, who serve full- or part-time during 10- to 12-month periods. Upon successful completion of their service, members receive an AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$4,725 to pay for college or graduate school or to pay back qualified student loans. Since 1994, the 750,000 individuals who have served in AmeriCorps have earned more than \$2.2 billion in education awards to help pay for college or pay back student loans. Each year, AmeriCorps invests more than \$150 million in expanding service-learning and campus volunteering—including approximately \$40 million in grants to institutions of higher education (AmeriCorps 2011).

Unlike many service-learning initiatives, AmeriCorps' effect has been evaluated in rigorous, longitudinal research. That research confirms that alumni of AmeriCorps are more likely to enter into nonprofit or government careers than their peers, with 60 percent of alumni choosing to work with a nonprofit organization or public agency (AmeriCorps 2008). Equally encouraging, more than two-thirds of former corps members report that their service was a plus for them in the job market. The skills AmeriCorps members gained include both those specific to their service (construction skills with Habitat for Humanity and YouthBuild, education skills from teaching or tutoring programs, weatherization skills from clean energy programs) and general skills of leadership and problem-solving that employers seek. The short summaries that follow highlight just some of the many “next generation” civic learning and democratic engagement efforts underway in American schools, colleges and universities today. They include:

Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Ashoka U, an off-shoot of the nonprofit Ashoka, promotes social entrepreneurship and innovation, and supports campus change teams to catalyze colleges and universities, students, and communities as cocreators of social change. Since its launch in 2005, Ashoka U has spread to 10 colleges and universities and draws on a network of more than 1,000 educators to advance social innovation at their home institutions. The University of Maryland–Baltimore County, one of the member campuses of the American Democracy Project, transformed its student government from a client-service model to one that promotes social entrepreneurship. Students now compete for cash prizes to carry out innovative ideas for improving the campus community. The first winning team was selected for its plan to transform used frying oil into fuel for green campus vehicles.

The Network For Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) trains classroom teachers to help students learn how to start a business of their own. Many students choose start-ups with a social impact. One 15-year-old in Los Angeles designed sugar packets made of dissolvable rice paper to reduce the amount of paper waste produced by coffee drinkers.

Dialogue Across Differences

The Interfaith Youth Core seeks to make interfaith cooperation a social norm. It has trained more than 4,000 interfaith leaders on 200 college and university campuses since 2002 around the world.

Sustained Dialogue, founded by a veteran U.S. diplomat, trains students here and abroad to moderate and participate in dialogue and action across differences.

Global Learning and Elections

At Georgia Tech University, the Vertically Integrated Projects (VIP) initiative includes an “eDemocracy” project. Faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates across several disciplines, including engineering and public policy, work together to develop cutting-edge, high-tech tools that are used to help monitor elections in emerging democracies.

Community-based Learning and Engagement

The Bonner Foundation supports anti-poverty programs in the area of hunger and education. It now provides four-year, service-learning college scholarships for more than 3,200 students annually at over 75 colleges and universities.

Another innovative program is EPICS—Engineering Projects in Community Service—which began at Purdue University with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education and has now spread to more than a dozen other campuses. In EPICS, engineering students work together with community organizations to identify challenges and design solutions, while they develop hands-on skills and reinforce their classroom learning. The newer EPICS program for high school students involves over 50 schools in ten states.

“Coaching” for Public Work

Public Achievement, founded and supported by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College, employs a civic education framework called “public work” in five states and 20 other countries. College students, graduate students, or K–12 classroom teachers serve as civic “coaches” for elementary and secondary school students who research, design, and implement collaborative public projects for the school or community. Public Achievement tries to cultivate students’ efficacy and civic agency: the goal is for students to discover that by working together across differences they have the power to bring about lasting, fundamental change.

Moral Reflection

Facing History and Ourselves—which views education as “the key to combating bigotry and nurturing democracy”—promotes rigorous investigation of the Holocaust and the study of other instances of religious and racial bigotry to help students in the United States and abroad combat prejudice and discover how individual choices can change the course of history. Since its launch in 1976, Facing History has trained more than 29,000 teachers and now reaches nearly two million students worldwide annually. Over 100 evaluations, including rigorous randomized control trials, have assessed the program’s effects. Results show that Facing History helps

increase teachers' capacity to foster students' civic understanding and skills and show that it boosts students' civic engagement and critical thinking skills.

Democracy in Action at the Local Level

The Mikva Challenge advances the view that “young people should have a seat at every decision-making table.” Low-income Chicago students in nearly 100 high schools participate in “hands-on civics education” including voter registration, mock elections, and youth policy councils. More than 20,000 students have participated since 2000.

Civics 2.0—Interactive Civics

Retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor founded iCivics, which uses interactive games to teach civics basics to younger students in a fun, engaging way.

Budget Hero, a new project of American Public Broadcasting, is an online federal budget simulation game that provides students and others with a chance to see the impacts of adjustments to federal revenue and spending.

Chapter 2: Minding the Gap

As encouraging as all these initiatives are, too few of even the most noteworthy programs are deeply integrated across the curriculum. Indeed, one of the most disturbing findings of *A Crucible Moment* is that the longer students stay in college, the wider the gap becomes between “their endorsement of social responsibility as a goal of college and their assessment of whether the institution is providing opportunities for growth in this area” (Dey 2009). Moreover, it is unclear whether the civic opportunities for students in schools and on college campuses lead to an increase in most students’ civic readiness. A survey of 24,000 students by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found only a third felt strongly that while in college their civic awareness had expanded, that the faculty publicly advocated the need for students to become active and involved citizens, that their college experience had helped them learn the skills needed to effectively change society for the better, or that their commitment to change society for the better had grown (ibid).

That discouraging portrait of civic learning in higher education is corroborated in other reports as well. The HERI survey finds that only about one-quarter of college seniors report that their understanding of the problems facing their community and their knowledge of people from different races and culture was much stronger at the end of college than at its start (Finley Forthcoming). The ongoing Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education similarly assesses the progress students make across a variety of learning outcomes during college. According to the study, more than half of students show no growth or a decline in valuing political and social involvement and in valuing diversity during their four years in college (Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts 2009). These findings make plain that our institutions of higher education—as well as elementary and secondary schools—need to both expand and transform their approach to civic learning and democratic engagement, rather than engage in tinkering at the margins. At no school, college, or university should students graduate with less civic literacy and engagement than when they arrived. As President Woodrow Wilson, a former university president, said more than a century ago about the obligations of colleges and universities, for every individual “touched with the spirit of our institutions, social service is the high law of duty, and every American university must square its standards by that law or lack its national title” (Wilson 1902).

Chapter 3: The Department's Role in Advancing Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy

Numerous federal agencies and departments support civic learning and engagement in democracy, including not just the Corporation for National and Community Service and its AmeriCorps programs, but the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, the Elections Assistance Commission, the State Department, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Agriculture, and Justice. Nevertheless, the Department of Education has an outsized role at the federal level in advancing civic learning and democratic engagement.

The Department cannot prescribe curricula, but it does support state and local efforts to teach American history, political science, the practical aspects of American government, and civic, global, and intercultural literacy. In addition, it supports engagement in practicum-like learning environments such as campus-community civic partnerships, service-learning programs, community-based learning, and student participation in professional and career programs that include aspects of civic responsibility.

Since its beginning in 1980, the Department of Education has supported civic learning and democratic engagement through a variety of programs and initiatives, including:

- **The Federal Work-Study (FWS) Program** <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/fws/index.html> mandates that participating postsecondary institutions use at least 7 percent of the total amount of funds awarded to provide community service jobs for students. In the 2009–10 award year, the actual sum used for such jobs came to \$222 million—not including the nonfederal matching funds—which are greater than 20 percent of funds awarded, far greater than the requirement. Community service jobs may include work with community-based organizations, schools, or government agencies to improve the quality of life for community residents in many areas, including health care, child care, social services, and community improvement. The FWS Program also allows funds to be used specifically for civic education. Funds granted to an institution may be used to compensate students employed in projects that teach civics in schools, raise awareness of government functions or resources, or increase civic participation.
- **The Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships** <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/fbci/index.html> at the U.S. Department of Education works to promote student achievement by connecting schools and community-based organizations, both secular and faith-based. The center is part of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which promotes partnerships between government and nonprofit organizations, both secular and faithbased, to more effectively serve Americans in need. The center is working with the White House and the Corporation for National and Community Service to oversee the *President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge*, an initiative inviting institutions of higher education to commit to a year of interfaith and community service programming on campuses. Over 270 institutions of higher education are participating in the challenge, and civic education is a key component of their service plans. Participants select one service priority for their interfaith challenge initiative, such as domestic poverty and educational opportunity, energy and the

environment, health services and healthy living, disaster preparedness, or veterans and military families.

- **Public Service Loan Forgiveness.**
<http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/PSF.jsp> Students with Federal Direct Student Loans may have the remaining balance of their loans forgiven after ten years of monthly payments while working in public service. The eligible organizations that provide public service jobs include a wide variety of entities, such as the military, public and private schools, and the government and nonprofit sectors. Coupled with the Income-Based Repayment option, Public Service Loan Forgiveness can make it easier for graduates to choose lower-paying but vitally important public service careers. Borrowers today are already working toward the loan forgiveness benefit, with the first eligible Federal Direct Loan borrowers eligible to apply for loan forgiveness in 2017. The Department also administers a Teacher Loan Forgiveness program, which can forgive up to \$17,500 in federal student loans to encourage more Americans to pursue the teaching profession.
- For the past 40 years, the **Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)** <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/fipse/index.html> has supported civic education, civic learning, community service, and service-learning in a host of projects. Since 2000, the FIPSE Comprehensive Program has funded more than 30 distinct projects that support curriculum and program development in civic learning and civic engagement. To take one example, the Bonner Foundation used a FIPSE grant to establish civic engagement certificates, concentrations, and minors. A number of postsecondary institutions have collaborated to train faculty to use primary sources in course development—creating courses that allow students to use local historical societies, museums, churches, newspapers, map collections, and archives.
- The **Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO)** <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html> are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities. The largest TRIO program, Upward Bound, supports low-income and educationally disadvantaged students in entering and persisting in college. It seeks to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. Some Upward Bound grantees encourage students to forge community partnerships and actively engage in civic activities.
- **Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act** <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idues/index.html> authorize programs that support the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving Institutions, Asian American and Pacific Islander-serving Institutions, Native American-serving Nontribal Institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions, and institutions that serve both Hispanic and certain low-income students. These programs primarily provide financial assistance to institutions for physical plant, financial management, academic resources, and endowment-building capacity. But they also support community outreach and student service activities, which some institutions have used to implement service-learning.
- The International and Foreign Language Education

(IFLE) <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/index.html> programs include components that support civic learning and democratic engagement in an international context. IFLE funding supports programs that provide learning opportunities to help U.S. students apply their knowledge of foreign civil societies and cultures to civic issues in the United States. For example, the study-abroad component of IFLE programs provides an opportunity for U.S. students to learn more about other cultures and perspectives on issues, such as the politics of access to clean drinking water or international business ethics. IFLE also provides funding for foreign language learning for U.S. students, helping U.S. students understand and appreciate people from other countries, while expanding job opportunities for U.S. students in careers in which proficiency in multiple foreign languages is an asset.

- Since 1999, the **English Literacy and Civics** <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/adultedbasic/index.html> program has emphasized the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government. In addition to supporting local adult education providers that offer English literacy and civics education services, states have also used these funds to create materials that can improve civic learning.

And finally, since 2005, the Department has required, by law, every educational institution that receives federal funds to hold an educational program about the U.S. Constitution for its students. **Constitution Day** <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/fund/guid/constitutionday.html> commemorates the September 17, 1787, signing of the U.S. Constitution. Each year the Department reminds schools, colleges, and universities of this occasion and points them to free educational resources made available by organizations such as the National History Education Clearinghouse and federal agencies such as the National Archives and Records Administration.

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SPOTLIGHT: Preparing Students for Nonprofit Leadership and Community Work

In 2010, FIPSE funded the Community Learning Partnership (CLP) to replicate a model for establishing Community Change Studies certificates and degree programs at community colleges. CLP is developing curriculum, creating a Web-based resource center, and supporting a Faculty Development Institute. Students prepare for careers in the nonprofit sector, which is projected to face a leadership gap by 2016.

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SPOTLIGHT: Engagement Through Service and Action

Students in the TRIO Upward Bound project at Concord University in Athens, W.Va., have initiated a number of community service projects, including volunteering as campus “buddies” for Special Olympic participants, and organizing “student voice” activities such as sending letters to the governor of West Virginia regarding ways to improve education in the state. The governor not only sent a letter of thanks to the students for their input but also forwarded their recommendations to the West Virginia Education Association and the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

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SPOTLIGHT: Service-learning in Communities and Curricula

Morris College, a Historically Black Institution, instituted a service-learning component in its Academic Student Service programs that coordinates the curriculum and community partners. Faculty members integrate service learning into a wide variety of courses.

Students complete the service-learning activities as well as the regular class activities. At the end of the course students write a reflection paper on their service-learning experience. Faculty members, community partners and students evaluate the service learning experience to determine areas that could be strengthened. Additionally, at the end of each semester, a service-learning forum is held to give faculty, students, and community partners an opportunity to describe their projects and to discuss the effect on student learning and on the partner organization.

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SPOTLIGHT: Innovative Ideas From the States

New York State used a U.S. Department of Education grant to develop a local curriculum program, entitled, **Sharing Common Ground in Rockland: U.S. History and Civics for ESL**. The state has collected data that suggest students completing this curriculum attain positive education and employment outcomes. Illinois has developed a teacher training video, **A Framework Comes Alive**, to help geographically dispersed educators to “see” what high quality English literacy and civics instruction looks like.

###

SPOTLIGHT: Empowering Students to Improve Federal Education Programs

Following the reauthorization of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** in 2004, the Department proposed several new regulations and invited the public to comment. Through public meetings and correspondence the Department received input from over 5,500 individuals and organizations. During one public meeting, a high school student asked that the new regulations change the Department’s definition of “other health impairment” to include Tourette Syndrome. The student spoke of the challenges faced by students with Tourette’s, a neurological disorder, who were often misclassified as “emotionally disturbed.” He argued that including Tourette’s in the definition of “other health impairments” would help correct misperceptions about the condition and ensure the needs of students with the disorder were met.

Due to his testimony and public comments, the Department included Tourette Syndrome as an example under “other health impairments” for IDEA. The final regulations were published in 2006 and are in effect today.

Conclusion: Nine Steps to Enhancing the Department of Education’s Commitment to Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy

The Department of Education issues this Road Map to enhance and expand its longstanding support for civic learning and democratic engagement. This Road Map is an integral part of the Department’s strategy for achieving the Obama administration’s goal that, by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The 2020 college attainment goal is more than a simple numeric aspiration that many more students will enroll in postsecondary education and obtain a degree by the end of the decade. It is also about the quality and content of that education. Our nation’s citizens must be qualified for the 21st-century jobs that require advanced training and education. They must also be prepared to fulfill their democratic responsibilities to their communities and their nation, and be competent to tackle complex global challenges with diverse groups and within diverse environments.

Civic learning is not only compatible with career preparation and improved graduation rates, but also is a core skill in preparing students to succeed as employees and citizens. As *A Crucible Moment* succinctly states, “It is time to bring two national priorities—career preparation and increased access and completion rates—together in a more comprehensive vision with a third national priority: fostering informed, engaged, responsible citizens.” Working hand-in-hand with other federal, state, and local authorities, schools and postsecondary institutions, and the nonprofit, business, and philanthropic communities, the Department of Education is looking to speed that shift by taking a number of steps with respect to its own programs and priorities. This Road Map focuses primarily on steps that will be accomplished within the statutory and budgetary confines of existing programs, while the Department looks for new opportunities to expand and accelerate civic learning.

The Department has identified nine steps it will take to advance civic learning and democratic engagement. They are:

- 1. Convene and catalyze schools and postsecondary institutions to increase and enhance high-quality civic learning and engagement.** The Department will do more to promote institutional commitment to high-quality civic learning and to advance public awareness of the vital role that educational institutions have in the development of an engaged and educated citizenry. Secretary Duncan and other department officials have given a number of speeches and authored commentaries about the importance of reinvigorating civics education in elementary and secondary education. Less attention has been paid to the need for expanding and improving civic learning and democratic engagement in postsecondary education. Department officials will encourage states, schools, and postsecondary institutions to conduct civic audits and develop and publish on their websites their plans and outcomes for educating students for informed engagement in civic life. The Department will also encourage postsecondary education leaders to join civic learning partnerships and adopt recommendations outlined in leading national reports and efforts, as appropriate.
- 2. Identify additional civic indicators.** The Department encourages data-based decision-making across all education programs, and civic learning and democratic engagement should be no exception. Improved indicators can better help educators understand students’ civic

strengths and weaknesses and lead to appropriate program design. The Department already captures some information about students' civic knowledge, attitudes and involvement through surveys and assessments, such as the NAEP Civics exam for fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students. To build on this foundation, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance will add questions to an upcoming national survey of high school students, the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS 2012), about their transitions to postsecondary experiences. NLTS 2012, which will survey students in 2012, is a study of students both with and without disabilities. Unlike the previous version of this study, NLTS 2012 will be nationally representative of all students aged 13–21 who are in school as of January 2012. The Department will disseminate these and other civic data to educators and the public.

- 3. Identify promising practices in civic learning and democratic engagement—and encourage further research to learn what works.** More robust evidence is needed on the effect of civic learning and democratic engagement in terms of students' civic outcomes and other measures of student success, such as high school graduation, college persistence and completion, academic learning, and career skills. The Department's National Center for Education Research will include language in the center's Requests for Applications indicating that civic learning and democratic engagement approaches are appropriate targets of intervention for improving academic outcomes. The center will provide information to the civic learning and democratic engagement community about competitively awarded IES research grant opportunities, which require a rigorous research methodology. The Department will also solicit promising civic learning and democratic engagement practices from the postsecondary education community as part of an upcoming Request for Information about strategies for increasing college completion. And the Department will encourage schools and IHEs to assess the impact of civic learning and engagement in democracy on the civic and economic health of the school or campus and community.
- 4. Leverage federal investments and public-private partnerships.** The Department will encourage grantees and grant applicants to include civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives in federally funded education programs where permitted and feasible. To this end, the Department may conduct presentations to raise awareness of civic learning and democratic engagement as allowable uses of program funds, or consider adjustments to program criteria and reporting outcomes. The Department will also encourage grantees to pursue public-private partnerships with businesses, foundations, and community-based organizations to advance their civic learning and democratic engagement goals.
- 5. Encourage community-based work-study placements.** Colleges and universities that participate in the Federal Work-Study program are required to use at least 7 percent of funds to pay FWS students employed in community service jobs. Many exceed this threshold, while others struggle to meet it. Consistent with the Department's interest in promoting work-study placements that align with—and are not a distraction from—students' learning and career interests, the Department will encourage the expansion of efforts to place FWS students in assignments appropriately tailored to their interests in federal, state, or local public agencies or private nonprofit organizations. Postsecondary institutions will be encouraged to share promising practices and track outcomes for students and the community.
- 6. Encourage public service careers among college students and graduates.** While every student must develop the basic civic knowledge and skills needed to participate in public life, some graduates will want to pursue careers in public service. Our communities need to attract

top talent to these important jobs in teaching, public safety, and other fields. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program—which forgives Federal Direct Loan debt after ten years of on-time monthly payments while working in a public service job—was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2007, along with the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) plan. But too few Americans know about these programs. The Obama administration is taking steps to make it easier for many borrowers to repay their federal student loans. Beginning in 2012, the Department will make publicly available an Employment Certification Form for borrowers interested in Public Service Loan Forgiveness to make it easier for them to track qualifying payments on their federal student loans toward applying for and receiving the PSLF benefit. The Department and President Obama will continue to publicize and promote the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program so that many more students learn of it. Additionally, President Obama has announced a proposal to cap federal student loan payments at 10 percent of income and forgive remaining balances after 20 years. The Department will work with higher education stakeholders toward realizing these changes through the negotiated rulemaking process.

7. Support civic learning for a well-rounded K–12 curriculum. Secretary

Duncan and senior Department officials have repeatedly stressed the importance of a well-rounded K–12 curriculum and their opposition to the narrowing of the curriculum that has happened in many schools as a result of high-stakes testing in math and English language arts. The Department’s Blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) proposes a new competitive program—Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education. It would assist states, local education agencies, and nonprofits in developing, implementing, evaluating, and replicating evidence-based programs that contribute to a well-rounded education—including civics, government, economics, and history. Other disciplines included in the program could incorporate evidence-based civic learning and democratic engagement approaches—such as service-learning. The Department will continue to call on Congress to reauthorize ESEA and stands ready to implement this new program.

8. Engage Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority-Serving Institutions—including Hispanic Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities—in a national dialogue to identify best practices.

In addition to preparing their students for the workplace and further study, HBCUs and MSIs have a distinguished history of preparing students to be national and community leaders in civil rights, the sciences, engineering, and medicine. The Department will encourage these institutions to maintain their focus on developing civic leadership and encourage them to identify relevant best practices from which all of America’s institutions of higher education might benefit.

9. Highlight and promote student and family participation in education programs and policies at the federal and local levels.

President Obama’s first Executive Order was a memo to federal agencies about making government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative. He called on the administration to “offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information.” Consistent with the president’s Executive Order, the Department will identify and promote opportunities for students and families to participate as collaborators and problem-solvers in education. Many programs, such as School Improvement Grants and Promise Neighborhoods, include family and community

engagement as program elements. This provides an opportunity for students, families, and leaders of community-based organizations to have a seat at the table and help shape solutions to challenges at the local level. In addition, the Department regularly invites the public to provide input to inform the Department's policymaking, such as draft regulations, proposals for reauthorizing education laws, and new priorities for grant programs. Students have contributed suggestions in the past—the "Spotlight" on page 16 about a student improving the Department's regulations on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is one example—but this happens infrequently.

The Department will identify and highlight opportunities to further involve students and families in the Department's public comment process. These nine steps form the Road Map for how the Department will seek to expand and elevate civic learning and engagement in the nation's 21st-century democracy. Readers are encouraged to send reactions to the Road Map to CivicLearning@ed.gov.

The United States is one of the most vibrant and diverse nations in the world. That is both an abiding strength and an ongoing challenge. With the issuance of *A Crucible Moment*, the launch of the American Commonwealth Partnership, and the Department's own Road Map, all the stakeholders in the American educational experiment have the opportunity to carry out their own plan of action and make a concerted effort to transform civic learning and democratic engagement in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. All students—regardless of race or income, religion or political affiliation—must be prepared for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life. The challenges to reaching that ambitious goal are many but so are the rewards for our nation. Now is the crucible moment. Now is the time to advance civic learning and democratic engagement throughout American education.

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